

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7352

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 2999

LIMDIS

FOR EUR/EE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, CZ

SUBJECT: SITUATION OF JEWISH COMMUNITY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

REF: DEAL/PERRY LETTER, NOVEMBER 21

1. WHILE SITUATION OF JEWISH COMMUNITY IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IS NOT ENVIABLE, EMBASSY IS INCLINED TO VIEW IT AS SYMPTOMATIC OF SITUATION OF CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIETY AS A WHOLE RATHER THAN AS DISTINCTLY ANTI-SEMITIC PHENOMENON. ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT AWARE OF ANY WHOLESALE FORCED RESIGNATIONS OF LEADERS, NEW PRESIDENT OF THE COMMUNITY HAS RECENTLY BEEN APPOINTED, AND IT IS PROBABLY SAFE TO ASSUME THAT HIS PREDECESSOR DID NOT RESIGN VOLUNTARILY. WE WOULD POINT OUT, HOWEVER, THAT CZECHOSLOVAK GOVERNMENT IS ENGAGED IN ALMOST CONTINUAL PURGING OPERATION WHICH PERMEATES ALL STRATA OF SOCIETY IN EFFORT TO ASSURE IDEOLOGICAL PURITY WHERE POSSIBLE, OR EUNICHISM WHERE IT IS NOT.

2. WE HAVE NOT NOTED ANY PRESS AND RADIO COMMENTING DIRECTED EITHER AT SPECIFIC INDIVIDUALS IN JEWISH COMMUNITY NOR AT COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE. GOVERNMENT POLICY IS CERTAINLY ANTI-ISRAEL AND ANTI-ZIONIST, AND TIGHTLY CONTROLLED MEDIA FAITHFULLY REFLECT THIS. SUCH ARTICLES AND BROADCASTS ACTUALLY SEEM TO HAVE TAPERED OFF SOMEWHAT, HOWEVER, AFTER A FAIRLY HEAVY CONCENTRATION IN EARLY 1974.

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3. ANTI-RELIGIOUS CAMPAIGN IS ALSO AN ON-GOING EFFORT ON PART OF CZECHOSLOVAK AUTHORITIES, AND OF COURSE THIS AFFECTS JEWS AS WELL AS OTHER RELIGIOUS GROUPS.

4. BEST ESTIMATES OF SIZE OF CZECHOSLOVAK JEWISH POPULATION PLACE IT AT SOME 15,000, OR APPROXIMATELY ONE TENTH OF ONE PER CENT OF TOTAL POPULATION. THUS IT IS NOT A PARTICULARLY VISIBLE FORCE ON THE CZECHOSLOVAK SCENE. MOST OF THOSE WHO DESIRED TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY DID SO IN 1948-50 AND 1968-69, AND THOSE REMAINING APPEAR TO BE PRETTY WELL INTEGRATED INTO THE COMMUNITY. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE MEDICAL AND LEGAL PROFESSIONS, AND, WE ARE TOLD, IN THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AND OTHER GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS WHERE FOREIGN LANGUAGE FLUENCY IS USEFUL. THERE ARE ALSO SOME IN THE PARTY. SOME SYNAGOGUES CONTINUE TO OPERATE AND ARE REASONABLY WELL ATTENDED. THESE FACTS, COUPLED WITH THE ABSENCE HERE, ESPECIALLY IN THE CZECH LANDS, OF ANY STRONG HISTORICAL TRADITION OF ANTI-SEMITISM SUCH AS ONE FINDS IN OTHER PARTS OF EASTERN EUROPE, LEAD US TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS NO SPECIFICALLY ANTI-JEWISH CAMPAIGN, BUT THAT THE PRESENT SITUATION OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY HERE ACCURATELY (AND SADLY) REFLECTS THAT OF ALL RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA AND BASICALLY OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK PEOPLE.

5. EMBOFF HAS CONTACTED OFFICES OF COUNCIL OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES REQUESTING THAT HE BE ALLOWED TO CALL AND DISCUSS ACTIVITIES OF ORGANIZATION AND PRESENT SITUATION. OFFICIAL THERE CORDIAL AND RECEPTIVE, AND PROMISED TO PHONE NEXT WEEK (AFTER NEW PRESIDENT HAS ASSUMED OFFICE) TO FIX APPOINTMENT. WE WILL HOPEFULLY BE ABLE TO PROVIDE FURTHER DETAILS THEN.
PERRY

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